

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 4537

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SUBJ: A TIME OF TESTING FOR THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION

REF: A) BOGOTA A53; B) BOGOTA 4494

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: PRESIDENT ALFONSO LOPEZ WHO, A YEAR AGO, HELD THE ENVIABLE POSITION OF PRESIDENT - ELECT WITH THE LARGEST ELECTORAL MAJORITY IN MMERN COLMOBIAN HISTORY, IS NOW FACIN THE MOST SEVERE TESTING OF HIS LEADERSHIP TO DATE. IN GENERAL TERMS THERE HAS BEEN A DISAPPOINTMENT WITH HIS LESS THAN DYNAMIC TYLE OF LEADERSHIP. IN RECENT DAYS, LOPEZ HAS ALSO HAD TO COME TO GRIPS WITH A NUMBER OF SPECIFIC PROBLEMS, INCLUDING AN INSTANCE OF THE HISTORICALLY DIFFICIULT LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CIVIL AUTHORITIES AND THE ARMED FORCES. POLITICAL PARTICIPANTS AND OBSERVERS HAVE BEEN PROMPT TO PREDICT FAR REACHING CHANGES, RANGING FROM CABINET CHANGES TO A MILITARY TAKE-OVER. LOPEZ IS NOW TRYING TO RIDE OUT RECENT EVENTS AND MADE AS FEW CHANGES AS POSSIBLE LEST HE APPEAR TO BE REACTING TO - AND SUSCEPTIBLE TO - THE FACTORS OPPOSING HIS ADIMINISTRATION. WITH THE PRESENT SITUATION APPROACHING A CRISIS FOR THE PRESIDENT, HE IS CLEARLY DUE FOR A PERIOD OD TESTINGKH THE QTE CLEAR MANDATE UNQTE OF ELECTION DAY 1974 IS NO LONGER THE POWERFUL ASSET THAT IT WAS; IN THE
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PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, LOPEZ WILL NEED TO USE ALL OF THE

POLITICAL SKILLS THAT TG CAN COMMAND. END SUMMARY.

2. THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION, THE BENEFICIARY OF A MASSIVE ELECTORAL VICTORY IN APR 1974, IS NOW FACED WITH SUBSTANTIAL DISENCHANTMENT AND, TO A GROWING EXTENT, DISSATISFACTION AMONG THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC. (THE CAUSES OF THIS SITUATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ARE ANALYZED IN BOGOTA A-53)/, THE ADMINISTRATION HAS NOT IMPLEMENTED ITS PROMISES OF SWEEPING SOCIAL CHANGE; IN ADDITION THERE IS A PERCEPTIBLE LACK OF CRISPNESS IN THE OPERATION OF THE PRESIDENCY AND A DEFINITE APPEARANCE OF DRIFT IN THE NATION'S PUBLIC AFFAIRS. FURTHER, LOPEZ, BY CHOOSING NOT TO INVOLVE HIM MLF DIRECTLY IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, HAS LOST A GOOD DEAL OF POLITICAL LEVERAGE. THE NET RESULT HAS BEEN A PRESIDENCY IN MAY 1975 THAT IS A LESS POWERFUL LEADERSHIP PLATFORM THAN THAT WHICH BECAME OPERATIVE IN AUG 7 OF LAST YEAR.

3. THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE FOR THE PRESIDENT'S POLITICAL PROBLEMS IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ARMED FORCES (CONSIDERABLY COMPLICATED BY FACTIONALISM WITHIN THE FORCES THEMSELVES. STARTING FROM THE USUAL SITUATION PREVAILING BETWEEN A LATIN AMERICAN CIVIL LEADER AND HIS MILITARY (SOMEWHAT ANALOGOUS TO A MAN WITH A PET PYTHON), LOPEZ FOUND HIMSELF HEIR TO A BITTER RIVALRY BETWEEN HIS DEFENSE MINISTER GENERAL VARON AND HIS ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL VALENCIA TOVAR. TO FURTHER COMPLICATE THE SITUATION, VALENCIA TOVAR IS THE RECIPIENT OF FREQUENT AND FAVORABLE PRESS COVERAGE, PROJECTING AN IMAGE OF EFFECTIVENESS AND VIGOR, IN CONTRAST TO THE LESS THAN DYNAMIC APPEARANCE OF THE PRESIDENT. VALENCIA TOVAR HAS, FOR SOME TIME, ADVOCATED THE USE OF A QTE STATE OF SIEGE UNQTE POWERS, A POTENTIALLY POLITICALLY DAMAGING MOVE THE PRESIDENT IS RELUCTANT TO TAKE. HE HAS BEEN SUPPORTED IFR THIS POSITION BY DEFENSE MINISTER, GEN VARON. ON MAY 13 (BOGOTA 4494) THE LOPEZ/ VALENCIA AND VALENCIA/VARON CONFERENCES ENTERED THE PUBLIC

PRINTS WITH THE SUDDEN RETIREMENT OF GENERAL PUYANA, AN IMPORTANT SUPPORTER OF THE VALENCIA FACTION.

4. THE PYANA REMOVAL, COMING AT A MOMENT WHEN PUBLIC DISORDER
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WAS AT AN INCREASED LEVEL, HAS ENGENDERED CONSIDERABLE REACTION AND SPECULATION. THE SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS (OF BOTH FACTIONS) WERE QUICK TO CALM THEIR MORE VOLATILE JUNIORS. THE POLITICIANS, HOWEVER, LACKING THE CONSTRAINT OF THE MILITARY MEN, HAVE SPECULATED FREELY. SOME OF THEIR COMMENTS ARE SUMMARIZED BELOW.

5. A LIBERAL MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES: LOPEZ

HAS TOLD AN OLD POLITICAL ALLY THAT HE HAS FOR TWO WEEKS BEEN GETTING REPORTS OF A COUP ATTEMPT AND NOW BELIEVES THAT THERE IS SOME FACTUAL BASIS FOR THE REPORTS. THE PRESIDENT WAS, THEREFORE, FORCING THE RETIREMENT OF SEVERAL HIGH RANKING OFFICIALS WHO SUPPORT GENERAL VALENCIA TOVAR. MANY LIBERALS, THE SOURCE SAID, EXPECTED LOPEZ TO REPLACE VARON WITH VALENCIA IN A MOVE TO NEUTRALIZE (SIC) THE TWO GENERALS) LOPEZ, THE REPRESENTATIVE SAID, STILL OPPOSES USE OF QTE STATE OF SIEGE UNQTE POWERS.

6. ANOTHER LIBERAL CONGRESSMAN AND A FORMER CIMIIC OFFICIAL (BOTH LOPEZ SUPPORTERS) : TTOCALM THE PUBLIC AND SATISFY THE MILITARY, LOPEZ WILL MAKE A NUMBER OF CABINET CHANGES AS EARLY AS LATE MAY. SUCH CHANGES WOULD INCLUDE REMOVAL OF JUSTICE MINISTER SANTOFINO, FINANCE MINISTER BOTERM AND LABOR MINISTER DE CROVO. OTHER CHANGES WILL ALSO BE MADE TO GIVE THE OPERATION THE APPEARANCE OF A ROUTINE SHIFT. THE SAME SOURCES SAY THAT LOPEZ WILL ALSO, RELUCTANTLY, DISMISS FINANCE MINISTER BOTERO WHO HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED WITH SEGNRAL UNPOPULAR ECONOMIC MEASURES AND IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CONTINUED INFLATION AND GROWING UNEMPLOYMENT. IN REFERENCE TO MRS DE CROVO, THE SOURCES SAID THAT HER HEAVY DRINKING HAS LED HER TO MAKE A NUMBER OF INFLAMMATORY STATEMENTS. (MRS DE CROVO HAS ALSO DRAWN THE WRATH OF THE INFLUENTIAL NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDUSTRIALISTS, WHO, ON MAY 15, LABELED SOME OF HER RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS AS QTE UNACCEPTABLE UNQTE.)

7. DESPITE THE WIDESPREAD SPECULATION AND PRESSURES FOR CHANGE, WE BELIEVE LOPEZ WILL TRY TO RIDE OUT THE PRESENT SITUATION WITHOUT INSTITUTING CHANGES IN HIS CABINET. TO MAKE SUCH CHANGES NOW WOULD BE AN INDICATION OF VULNERABILITY TO HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS AND TO THE PUBLIC AT LARGE. THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PRESIDENT HAS RECENTLY QTE GONE TO THE PUBLIC SQUARES UNQTE TO GIVE A SERIES OF SPEECHES DESIGNED TO REGAIN SOME OF THE POPULAR SUPPORT THAT HAS SLIPPED AWAY DURING THE PAST NINE MONTHS. GIVEN THIS CONCERN ON HIS PART, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT LOPEZ WOULD WILLINGLY DO ANYTHING NOW THAT COULD LESSEN THE STABILITY OF HIS REGIME.

8. THE MOST DANGEROUS ASPECT OF THE CURRENT STORM CLOUDS REMAINS THE MILITARY SITUATION WHICH CONTINUES TENSE. IF LOPEZ CAN GET THROUGH SEVERAL MORE DAYS OF RELATIVE CALM, WE BELIEVXGHE WILL BE ABLE TO AVOID THE UNWELCOME TASK OF EFFECTING MAJOR CHANGES AMONG HIS TOP LEVEL ADVISORS AFTER ONLY NINE MONTHS IN OFFICE.
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